

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend Claims 34 and 48.

1-33. (Cancelled).

34. (Currently Amended) A thermal treatment installation/ring combination comprising a loading chamber, transport means and a thermal treatment chamber for carrying out a thermal treatment, said thermal treatment chamber comprising a top section and a bottom section located opposite to each other and between which a wafer can be accommodated for carrying out a thermal treatment, said transport means being equipped to move wafer/ring combinations from the loading chamber into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa, wherein said thermal treatment chamber is configured to carry out a thermal treatment on one wafer at a time, said transport means being equipped to move individual wafer/ring combinations from the loading chamber and insert said individual wafer/ring combination into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa, wherein the thermal treatment chamber is configured to accommodate said ring surrounding the wafer and to hold the wafer contact-free in a floating state during the treatment, wherein a separation between said top and bottom sections at a location of the ring during the thermal treatment essentially corresponds to a thickness of said ring.

35. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment/ring combination of Claim 34, wherein said top section and bottom section are provided with heating means.

36. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 34, wherein an internal diameter of an inner edge of the ring is larger than an external diameter of the wafer.

37. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 34, wherein the ring is configured to support said wafer at least during transfer.

38. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 37, wherein the ring is mechanically joined to the transport means.

39. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 37, wherein the treatment chamber is configured to accommodate an auxiliary element for supporting the ring and the wafer at least during transfer.

40. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 39, wherein said auxiliary element is mechanically joined to the transport means.

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41. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 39, wherein said ring is provided with heating means wherein the heating means are provided within the ring.

42-47. (Cancelled).

48. (Currently Amended) A thermal treatment installation/ring combination comprising a loading chamber, wherein a wafer and a ring are combined to form a wafer/ring combination, and a thermal treatment chamber for carrying out a thermal treatment, said thermal treatment chamber comprising a top section and a bottom section located opposite to each other and between which the wafer can be accommodated for carrying out a thermal treatment, wherein said thermal treatment chamber is configured to carry out a thermal treatment on one wafer at a time, wherein the thermal treatment chamber is configured to accommodate said ring surrounding the wafer with a distance between said top and bottom sections at a location of the ring during the thermal treatment essentially corresponding to a thickness of said ring and wherein the ring is configured to surround the wafer within the thermal treatment chamber and within the loading chamber, wherein said installation/ring combination is configured and operable to move the wafer/ring combination from the loading chamber into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa.